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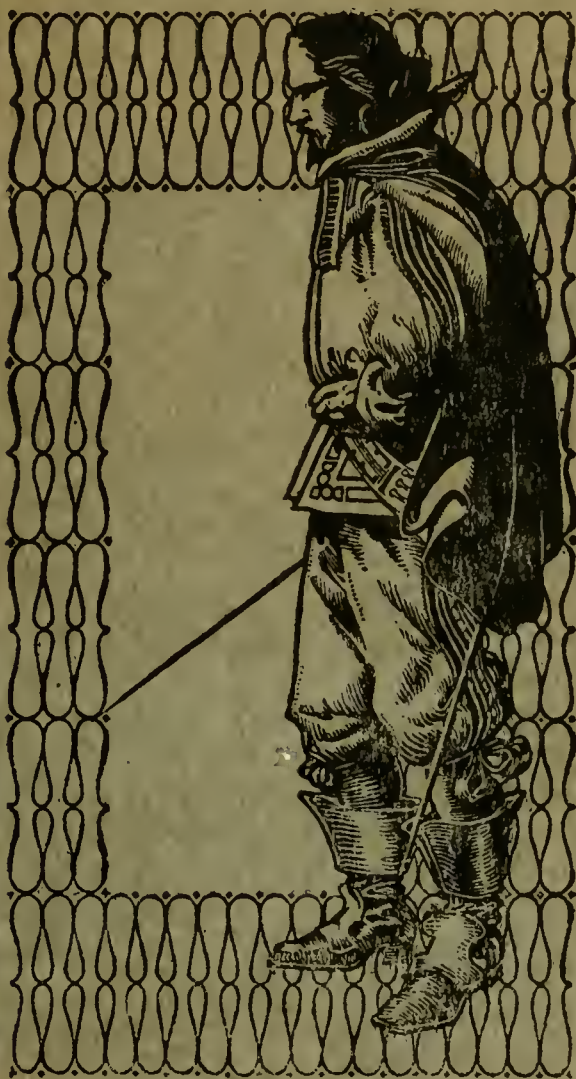
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*while I live, to be a ruler of life, not a slave,
to meet life as a powerful conqueror."*

WALT WHITMAN



The Poetry of Common Life

A Tract for Any Time

By Carl Safford Patton

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The Poetry of
Common Life

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The Poetry of Common Life

*"God is the perfect poet
Who in his person acts his own creations."*
BROWNING.

*"There is no heroic poem in the world but is at
bottom a biography, the life of a man; there is no life
of man, faithfully recorded, but is a heroic poem of
its sort, rhymed or unrhymed."*

T. CARLYLE.

The Poetry of Common Life

In one of his essays Robert Louis Stevenson quotes the saying that "a poet has died young in the breast of the most stolid"; and then adds, "It may be contended rather that a (somewhat minor) bard in almost every case survives."

Stevenson's correction contains much the truer statement. Not that each one of us could have been a poet in the ordinary sense, if we had tried hard enough. But every man,—or almost every man,—is born with some ear for rhythm, some feeling for the beauty of ideas and the music of words,—some instinct for poetry and idealism; and though the search for knowledge, and the pursuit of wealth, and the cares of this life dry him up tremendously as time goes on, it is seldom that they can choke this side of his nature entirely out.

Well do I remember the time when I had heard that there was such a thing as poetry, but had no knowledge what it was, when I stumbled, of all books in the world, upon Pope's "Essay on Man." I do not suppose I could read it now for wages. I do not know why I should have read it then. Perhaps it was merely the jingle in the words; perhaps it was the introduction to a new set of ideas and to a truly great mind. Whatever it was, I read the "Essay on Man" straight through. I went about inquiring of this person and of that, whether he had read Pope's "Essay on Man." I was a trifle daunted by the fact that no one,—not even my own father,—appeared to have done so. I urged the neighbors to take up this task at once, though I never received evidence that any of them had followed my exhortation. But at all events, I had come through, by way of this decidedly unpromising door, into a new world.

"Then felt I like some watcher of the skies,
When a new planet swims into his ken,
Or like stout Cortez, when with eagle eyes,
He stared at the Pacific."

On into this new realm I traveled, without comrade or guide, stumbling along as best I could, a good part of the time out of the road, or making a path for myself,—but in the path or out of it, all the time delighted and surprised. There is one old book in particular,—called, I believe, "The Household Book of English Poetry." It stood on

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the what-not in the southwest corner of the best room. Not in my father's house,—no such good luck as that; but in the house of a farmer for whom I used to work during the summer vacation. I dare say the noon-hour would not have appeared to me the longest in the day, anyway; but what made it seem like a moment,—and yet a moment worth all the rest of the day, was this old green book. If I could have that identical book, now, on my study shelf, I should feel as if my oldest and best friend had come to see me.

I have diligently searched my memory of a period somewhat later in my life, and I can not recall that any lesson in college, nor any approaching examination, nor any other crisis in my educational career, ever kept me up beyond a seemingly hour at night. But I do well remember the hours I spent, on into the wee-small, with Robert Burns, and how next day, with my "Gallic War" open in my hand and the teacher looking straight at me, the only things that would seem to run through my head were, "Highland Mary" and "Ye banks and braes o' Bonny Doon." It is probably a pity, the things I did not learn in college, because I was forever wandering around in this imaginary realm; and yet sometimes I wonder whether any man ought to be called an educated man who has not by one path or another found his way out into this wonderful world of the imagination and the feelings.

But though there is this particular period of a man's life when the poetical instinct in him is strongest, there is probably more poet in the mature man than we think. I am surprised, often, to find how many business men there are, occupied and pre-occupied, and apparently of the earth earthy, who have a nook in the library corner with a favorite book of poems in it; or who carry about in some pocket-book that does not smell at all of the ideal, some copy of verses they have recently cut from the newspaper. I have always thought it one of the most characteristic and representative things about President Lincoln, that poor and uneducated as he was, harassed at home and perplexed abroad, he had his favorite poem; and often, in the cabinet meeting, or in the midst of heart-breaking reports from the war, he would say over the words of it to himself as if they were a sort of charm;—

"O why should the spirit of mortal be proud?"

Even the average man does not seem to be able to get along without something of this kind.

The old farmer takes down his spectacles from the shelf behind the stove, gets the family Bible from the cupboard, and reads; "Where wert thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding. Who laid the corner-stone thereof, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Hath the rain a father, or who hath begotten the drops of dew? Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion?"

He reads, or so he supposes, for purely religious purposes,—because it is "the word of God."

But really he reads it, and he loves it, because it is poetry to him; it satisfies that sense which was born in him when his mother sang her lullaby over his cradle and told him folk-lore and fairy-tales. And the next day he looks up, from the corn-field or the meadow, and it says itself over again in his mind, "Loose the bands of Orion,—when the morning stars sang together." It is a light let down into his prosaic world from realms above, and helps him, as it was said of Burns, to

"Walk in glory and in joy,
Behind his plow along the mountain-side."

Or he goes to hear a great preacher;—Brooks or Beecher or Spurgeon. And what he likes about him, tho' often he does not know it,—is the poet in him. He hears Spurgeon say, for instance, "Let me be buried somewhere under the boughs of a spreading beech, with a green grass mound above me, out of which primroses and daisies peep in their season; a quiet shady spot where the leaves fall and the robins play, and the dew-drops gleam in the sunshine. Let the wind blow fresh and free over my grave, and if there must be a line about me let it be this: Here lies the body of John Plowman, waiting for the appearing of his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Now what he likes about this is undoubtedly the religion; but it is also, and equally, the poetry.

As the poetry of common life is not always in rhyme, so it is not always in books of any kind, nor in concert halls, nor in great assemblies swayed by the orator's voice. The larger part of it, in fact, the average man must read from one of those two great volumes which God has placed at every man's elbow, the book of nature and the book of human life. He sees the clouds floating above him like huge navies upon an open sea; he hears the rain upon the roof at night; he wanders out, of a Sunday after-

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noon, into the fields, and sniffs the air that comes across the meadows,—and it is all poetry to him. Not the poetry of mere words, but the larger, purer, stronger poetry of nature. It takes him back to other meadows, over which he walked in years long gone. It sets his heart to singing old tunes. For

“Ever upon this stage,” as Walt Whitman says,
“Is acted God’s calm, annual drama,
Gorgeous processions, songs of birds,
Sunrise, that fullest feeds and freshens most the soul,
The heaving sea, the waves upon the shore,
The countless armies of the grass,
The scenery of the snows, the winds’ free orchestra,”—

this is the poetry which God has written, and which he writes afresh every year;

“The green grass is bowing
The morning wind is in it,
’Tis a tune worth the knowing
’Tho’ it echange every minute.”

This is the rhythm, and the beauty, and the swing, of which the poetry of words is a feeble imitation;—and this poetry every man of us may read; it is the poetry of common people.

And side by side with this volume of nature, there stands the volume, from the same author, of human life. You look out of the car window, and see the cottage at the side of the road,—the grass neatly cut, the whitewashed fence, the children playing on the porch. Or you look up a little higher on the hillside, and see the “Farm Picture;”

“Through the ample open door of the peaceful country
barn,
A sunlit pasture field, with cattle and horses feeding;
And haze, and vista, and the far horizon fading away.”

You watch your daughter as she grows taller, and slenderer and more like her mother. You go past the school-yard when the children are playing at recess, and there is your own boy kicking around among the rest, and you could pick him out from all of them a mile away. You sit down of an evening, and think of one who believed in you when there was not much of you to believe in, whose confidence in you made you whatever you are, who is perhaps still plodding along the pathway of life by your side, or possibly gone from you to leave you poorer, and yet richer, as long as you live. You think of the years that have gone over your head since you made your first serious plans in life,—of the disappointments and the sorrows, and of the joys and satisfactions in which they have been drowned; and through it all you hear a refrain

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which your ear can not mistake, and it is poetry to you. Not your own life alone, of course,—that by itself is only a line, perhaps only a word; but your life as it has fallen into the current of life about it and moved on in symmetry and meaning toward the end. There is some pathos in it to be sure, as there is in all good poetry. There are some things whose meaning is illusive and obscure. There are passages which, if they stood alone, would be not merely prose, but such prose as you must always be ashamed of. But coming out above all these, is the harmony of your spirit with the spirits of others; there is the soul's deep question and answer; there is the mystery and the light on the mystery; there is the motion and rythm and power that belong to poetry. It is out of this volume,—this book of common life,—that the common man must read.

Far and away above any of these things, however, the poetry of common life finds its supreme expression in religion. I do not refer merely to the fact that religion always creates a poetry of its own, and that this poetry is usually the best in all literature. This indeed is true. I refer to the fact, that the only interpretation which can turn our common human life into poetry is the interpretation given to it by religion. Let human life be merely what natural science declares it to be, or only what the actual experience of many of us finds it, and it is a decidedly prosaic thing. But let it be, what religion has always declared it to be, an effluence of the divine life, a real, though partial and stammering utterance of an infinite meaning, and one can catch even in its imperfect and unfinished sentences the note of a true poetry. So it is that all the great poets, practically, have been religious men. Their religion has brought them to poetry, and their poetry has brought them to religion.

For God is not merely an infinite conscience or an infinite power. He is also infinite beauty and joy,—light of all light, meaning of all meaning, wisdom of all wisdom,—the Poet whose work began with the history of the universe, who wrote first in the star-dust, and scattered hither and yonder a verse in the infinite reaches of space until his words filled the heavens, and who now and forever utters his word of beauty and joy and love in “the human heart by which we live.” Know this Poet; catch His spirit; look at the books of Nature and Human Life through the eyes of Him who wrote them, and read the drama of your own life to the end.



What People Live For

*"How good is man's life, the mere living!
how fit to employ
All the heart and the soul and the senses
forever in joy."*

BROWNING.

*"The best portion of a good man's life,—
His little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness
and of love."*

WORDSWORTH.

What People Live For

When a man goes for the first time into a big city, and instead of having the sidewalk mostly to himself as he does in his native village, finds himself pushed and jostled and carried along like a drop of water in a great stream, his first and most persistent thought is, who are all these people, where did they come from, where do they go to, what are they all doing here?

If one uses his imagination a little, and thinks of the people whom he has never seen, and never will see, but who in similar fashion crowd the streets of London and Paris and Pekin; if he adds the people who pass back and forth over country highways and linger in the village streets; if he adds to these the people who are gone from our world now, but who walked these same streets and thronged these same cities, and dwelt in these same countries scores, and hundreds, and thousands of years ago, then all the more he wonders, and asks himself, "What do people live for?"

It may be safely assumed at the outset, that there are very few people, or ever have been, who live entirely for themselves. Even the robber, the thief, the bank-wrecker, the man who sells his city or his state, never follows his course for himself alone. It is always partly for someone else,—for his wife and daughters, for his friends, for his relatives,—for somebody beyond himself. I am not sure that there is anyone so low down,—not even the tramp, the drunkard, the opium-eater,—but this is true of him. I am not sure but that, even as he rides on the bumpers, or shuffles off to take his sixty days, or hunts out under cover of the darkness his place of debauchery, there is always in his mind the picture of somebody beside himself,—some wife or child who waits for him, some pard who tramped the country road and counted the railway ties with him in other times,—some person whose life has been linked with his, to whom his heart-strings, torn and dirty as they are, are still in some way fastened.

The more I know of men the more I must believe, that of men in their senses, and outside of the gutter and the penitentiary, the only men who live for themselves alone are in the storybooks. There are many men who want what they ought not to have, and who get it in ways that are disgraceful;

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but even such men do not want it for themselves alone.

Of all the things that ordinary people do live for, the commonest, I think, is home. There are a few years when this object is absent from a man's mind. They are the years when he is not yet a man and no longer a boy; perhaps also the few years which come to him when his wife is dead, his children are grown up and gone, and nothing left for him to look forward to except the rest of the grave. But if you take off these few years at each end of a man's life, the one thing for which he lives is his home.

This is not true of the exceptional man alone; it is true of the average man. Stop the first man you meet on the street,—“rich man, poor man, beggar-man, thief, lawyer, doctor, butcher, priest,”—any man, going along with preoccupied mind, thinking of the case he is to plead, the trade he is to make, the book he is to write. Get into this man's mind, down below this particular thing that is on the surface of it, and down there there is one picture that you will always find, the picture of a cozy-corner somewhere, of a woman sitting by the center table or before the fire, of two or three growing girls, and a boy or two that look like him. Ninety-nine men out of every hundred, say with Robert Burns,

“To make a happy fire-side clime,
For weans and wife,
That's the true pathos and sublime
Of human life.”

I know, there are men who do not say this. There are also men who are saints at home and devils abroad. There are other things to live for. A man may work, and struggle, and save, and bring home everything he gets and lay it at the feet of his wife and daughters, and still be in some other respects not very much of a man. Nevertheless this is the first thing for which the average man lives. Meet him wherever you will, find him in whatever occupation, or in whatever stage of spiritual or intellectual development; whenever you get under his jacket, whether it is a blouse or a tuxedo, you'll find this picture hanging on the wall of his heart. How can the world ever go seriously wrong so long as this is true?

There are probably some people who live for money. As a rule, however, the men who seem to live for money, live for something else. They want the money only as a means for something beyond

it. Or they want it merely for the fun of getting it. The fashionable wife and daughters of a rich man, do not live for money; they live to move in society, to travel around the country, to change their clothes, to be talked about, to stand at the head of the social column. The business man who has made his way from a poor boy, and has all the money he wants and more than he knows what to do with, works harder than he did when he was poor. People say, "What does he want of any more money?" He does not care for the money. He cares for the game. He is like a gambler. He lives not for what he can make, but for the excitement of the contest. He lives to beat the other man, to come out ahead, to see what he can do, to be in the world, and of it, and ahead of it. Most of the people who seem to live for money, really live for these other things.

Many people also live not for any such visible things, but for the intangible thing which we call effect. They are idealists. They believe that appearances are the only realities, and they live for appearances.

When men, or more especially women, have sincerely espoused this creed, it is astonishing what sorrows, what pains of mind and body, what troubles real as dirt they will endure, that they may keep this faith that is in them. I have known a woman who would rather see her boys go to the dogs, and keep up meanwhile the impression which the family has always made upon the town, than to admit that her boys are worthless and set about making them good-for-something. Not but that she loves her children, either. But when you get clear into the center of her mind, below all trivialities such as morals or religion or mere facts, there is only one question there, and that is the question, "What will people think?" Even when she thinks she measures her conduct by other standards, she really measures it by that. It's all she has. Her "esse" is "percipi," as Berkeley would have said; her essence is to be seen; and beyond how she and hers look to those who see her, there is nothing.

There was a curious illustration of how far this living for appearances will take a person, in the case of a man down in Maine a few years ago. He was a lawyer in one of the finest villages, and the first man of the town. People called him "Judge." He lived in a fine old house on the edge of the village, with spacious grounds. He entertained some, but not largely. He was modest in his

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tastes generally. He had no desire to pose as a nabob, or to make himself better than his neighbors. All he wished was to stand as a gentleman of the old school, free, courteous, open-handed, benevolent. He did not waste his money. He helped many poor people. He did not have a single bad habit, nor evil associate. He had no family, and lived alone with his aged house-keeper. One of his peculiar hobbies was to carry a roll of bills in the pocket of his white vest, and wherever he was on Sunday, at home or away, to go to church, and deposit some part or all of this roll on the contribution plate. From these generally quiet, benevolent New England habits he never deviated in the slightest degree. One Sunday he went home from church and shot himself. They began to examine his books, and found that for twenty years he had been stealing practically every cent of the money which he had been spending in these delightful ways. And the most significant fact of his whole career was, that on this very morning when he went home from church and shot himself, he had sat in his pew as usual, and as his father had sat there before him, and when the plate came by him, had with his customary simplicity and lack of display, slipped five new ten-dollar bills onto it.

This man presents a perfectly clear case. He did not care for the money he stole, and used but little of it on himself. He lived for the impression he produced. He knew that there was only one end to his career. He saw it drawing nearer every day. He knew it might have to come anytime, and whenever it had to come he was ready for it. But the thing he lived for was this impression he produced. So long as he could produce this, life was worth living. He would rather produce this impression for a few years, and then have his memory cursed by the people he had robbed, than to live in any other way and live out his natural days in honor. He might have lived twenty years longer; he might have left an honorable name and a host of friends; he might have done various other such things; but he would not have produced the impression. And the impression was the only thing he lived for.

Among the people whom we all know, there are also many who live for their children. Here we get down to one of the commonest, but one of the deepest, noblest and most significant facts about our whole human family.

The people who live for their children are women, usually; but not always. Nor can it be

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maintained that women who live for their children are always wise about it. It might be better often to let the children live for themselves. Sometimes a woman gets up at four o'clock in order to let her daughters sleep till eight; she washes and scrubs and irons that her daughters may look as well as anyone's, she saves her daughters' hands and her daughters' complexions and her daughters' feelings at the expense of her own; and the total result of the whole process often is that the mother is worn out in body and mind and the daughters grow up to be exacting and ungrateful, and generally worthless. When self-sacrifice is so scarce, it seems too bad to throw any of it away.

But in spite of this, here is where we show our deepest relationship, in both directions,—below us toward the tiger who will die for her cubs, and above us to God "who doth provide and not partake." Nothing in the natural man goes deeper, or looks higher, than just this.

And something of this sort, most of us have. Occasionally, no doubt, a man is without it. I remember one old acquaintance, a respectable, educated, but generally worthless man. His father had left him a handsome property, and all he had ever done was to collect the rent. I saw him once, after years of absence, and asked him how the world went with him. He told me about his business. I asked about his family. He said he had two children; looked sheepish, then paused, and said that sometimes he wished he had more. Then he paused again, and after a moment said, "But I'll tell you; I want somethin' left for myself." I had always known that he was mean; I had seen him in many small places, but I never saw him shrivel as he did when he said that. It goes far to argue a mistake in the evolutionary process, that from an ape who will risk her own life to save that of her babe should be descended a man who will talk that way. There are not many such, thank God. With a few exceptions, every generation lives for the generation that follows it. "In the black hand of every coal-miner," said John Mitchell at the time of the anthracite strike, "there is the white hand of a child." We live again in our children. If we are even half human we also live for them.

There are always, once more, a few men whose ambition in life is chiefly intellectual. The one thing they live for is to learn. They want to know. The "why" of the small boy has grown larger and more insistent with them until it is almost the only

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question. Such a man was Aristotle, Newton, Kepler. Such men have been the great inventors, discoverers, thinkers, of the world. A small company, obscure, humble, unromantic, they have carried the torch in whose light the rest of us have walked.

This kind of man is particularly hard for the ordinary man to understand. People see him digging away in his library or his laboratory. He seems to be merely amusing himself. "What does he do with all his learning?" people ask. They can not understand that the mere desire to know may become a mastering passion, and that a man may live not to earn money with his learning, nor to get fame by it, nor to prop up with it the time-honored claims of the church or the state,—nor to do anything else with it,—but merely and solely to learn.

Yet men do live for it. They live for it now, in what we call our materialistic age, just as they have in all ages. While they are alive we call them book-worms, fiends, freaks; after they are gone we call them scientists, philosophers, wise-men. There is no beauty in them that we should desire the life they live; but they change the face of nature and the course of human aspirations, and in their footsteps we common people unequally and often unthankfully tread.

In his "Religion and Philosophy in Germany," the poet Heine draws a typical picture of such a man. "The life of Immanuel Kant," he says, "is hard to describe; he had neither life nor history in the ordinary sense. He lived an abstract, mechanical, old-bachelor existence, in a quiet remote street of Koenigsberg. I do not believe that the great cathedral clock of that city accomplished its work in a less passionate and more regular way than its countryman, Immanuel Kant. Rising from bed, coffee-drinking, writing, lecturing, eating, walking, everything had its fixed time; and the neighbors knew that it must be exactly half-past four when they saw Prof. Kant, in his grey suit, with his cane in his hand, step out of his house door, and move toward the little lime-tree avenue, which is named, after him, the Philosopher's Walk. Eight times he walked up and down that walk at every season of the year; and when the weather was bad, or the grey clouds portended rain, his servant, old Lampe, was seen anxiously following him with a large umbrella under his arm, like an image of Providence. Strange contrast between the outer life of the man and his world-destroying thought. If the citizens of Koenigsberg had had any inkling of the

meaning of that thought they would have shuddered before him as before an executioner. But the good people saw nothing in him but a professor of philosophy, and when he passed at the appointed hour they gave him friendly greetings, and set their watches."

Of such a man, it is plain that he lives to think. But it is equally true of many men who are neither philosophers nor scientists, nor great minds of any sort. A man may be a teacher of science and yet not care much to know; or he may be a cabinet-maker, or even a preacher, and yet his real interest in life be a purely intellectual one. Sometimes this intellectual animus will get into a whole people;—so John Watson recently declared that Scotland was not so much a country as it was a theological debating society. Certainly, for those who feel it, nothing, not even bread-and-butter, comes closer home, or is a more practical incentive, or more outlasts the changes of life, than this desire to know.

There are also the men who live for the service they can render to some "cause." They are not discoverers, but champions. They want to learn, but never for the sake of the mere learning; their real business is to fight. It may be a reform in government it may be an advance in scientific ideas; it may be a progress in religious beliefs; whatever it is, no soldier ever threw himself into battle with more zest than these men put themselves into the fight for their idea.

The great names in this class are among the greatest the world has known,—Oliver Cromwell and William the Silent in government, Darwin and Huxley in science, Amos, and Jeremiah, Knox, Luther and Calvin in religion.

But this service of an idea is not above common men. I have known, and do know, many men who live for it. It may not always be so great an idea;—it may sometimes be a small one, and even a mistaken one. I know men with whom home and family and money and appearances and learning are all incidental, who really live to fight the new theology; they could say their "nunc dimmittis" with joy if they could only hear again the phrases they used to hear.

But even when the idea for which a man lives is a small or a mistaken one, no man is altogether small who can live for one. Henry George won an international reputation, and deserved it, by putting his life at the service of an idea which most men believe to be mistaken. "Golden Rule Jones"

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made his name a household word by the championship of an idea that most men believe to be impracticable.

If I were to pick out two men, one from the first century and one from the last, who may stand as typical of the men of all ages who live for an idea, I should take two men unlike in almost all respects except this one,—I should take Herbert Spencer and the Apostle Paul. I should show you Spencer, getting hold somehow of the great idea of evolution, and seeing with a marvelous insight akin to inspiration, its bearing upon the great questions of human society, and then, at forty years of age, sitting down to the task of elaborating this idea into a system of philosophy; sticking to this task, in poverty and sickness and isolation, for forty years until he accomplished it; publishing every one of his books at his own expense, and absolutely without hope of remuneration; and, when he died, leaving what little money he had as a fund for the continuation of his work, that after he was gone his books might still be issued to a public who did not care enough for them to pay for them.

But by far the greatest representative of this kind of men I should take to be the Apostle Paul. An interpretation of Christianity absolutely his own; a task imposed by his own restless mind and eager heart; a life of toil and travel and privation and abuse, with home and family and friends and the religion of his fathers behind him; a victory for the name and cause he loved, such as few men have ever won,—this is what it means, at its best, to live for an idea.

These are some of the things that people live for. Why, indeed, should any of us plod drearily along for board and clothes, when we might be servants of the ideal? Why lose ourselves in the mere humdrum and monotony of life, when we might be fighting the battles of the infinite and the eternal? Why live merely to pay the rent, or get the housework done, when truth and wisdom are crying in the streets? Let every man live for something larger than himself; for something that was here before he came, and will be here long after he is gone; for the truth that can not perish, for the wisdom that is from above, for the peace and happiness that make life good. This is that "Kingdom of Heaven" of which Jesus said so much, and which he himself lived, and died, to hasten.

Living in the Present

"Time's the king of men."

SHAKESPEARE.

*"Like as the waves make toward the pebbled shore,
So do our minutes hasten to their end."*

SHAKESPEARE.

"Remember that man's life lies all within the present, as 'twere but a hair's-breadth of time; as for the rest, the past is gone, the future yet unseen. Short, therefore, is man's life, and narrow is the corner of the earth wherein he dwells."

MARCUS AURELIUS.

Living in the Present

Hamlet describes man as a "creature of large discourse, looking before and after." This is, I suppose, one of his most marked peculiarities among the animals. The other animals look out upon time as if through a little peek-hole, and see the single section of it upon which they are borne along at the moment; man looks up the stream to see where it came from, down it to see whither it is going, and puts his paddle in on this side or on the other, according to what is ahead of him. And the higher man rises, on the road from savagery to civilization, the more this is true of him.

But this which is man's peculiar prerogative and glory, may also become his temptation. Merely because he can look before and after, he may sometimes lose the art which the other animals have of taking each day as it comes. His large discourse may prove a mere distraction to him, until instead of standing stoutly upon the duty and achievement of the hour, he may lean unsteadily upon the crutches of memory and hope.

There are people, plenty of them, who do not live now, as truly as they live in the future or in the past. They use the present only as a vantage ground from which to gather up the results of what has been, or to get ready for what is going to be.

Now the man who has not enough sentiment about him to spend an hour once in a while thinking of the past, is greatly to be pitied. And the man who has not enough imagination so that whenever he thus looks back he sees the old days through a haze of glory, is still worse off. "The thought of my past years," says Wordsworth, "doth breed in me perpetual benediction." So it ought in every man.

It is a symptom, I suppose, of the poet who is born in every one of us, and who in some slight measure survives the passage of the years. This old home which I remember, among the trees at the edge of the village,—the big attic and the barn, and the boys that played in them,—and the trapeze behind the house, and the hollow beyond the school-yard, and the big hill, and forms and voices since seen and heard in many parts of the earth,—I may go through dismal scenes before I die, or through bright ones, but neither will ever make this recollection any less sacred and beautiful.

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"I have had play-mates, I have had companions,
In my days of childhood, in my joyful school-days,
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

Friend of my bosom, thou more than a brother,
Why wert thou not born in my father's dwelling?
So might we talk of the old familiar faces:—

How some they have died, and some they have left me,
And some are taken from me, all are departed,
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces."

I can imagine that every man, who is not a positive curmudgeon, may be in a mood to say once in a while:

"Oh the happy days o' youth are fast gaun by,
An' age is comin' on wi' its bleak winter sky;
An' whaur shall we shelter frae its storms when they blaw,
When the gladsome days o' youth are flown awa'?

They said that wisdom came wi' manhood's riper years,
But naething did they tell o' its sorrows and tears;
O, I'd gie a' the wit, gif ony wit were mine,
For ae sunny morning o' bonny lang-syne."

If this is sentimentalism,—and I suppose it is,—it is sentimentalism of a harmless and beautiful kind. If we may read poetry out of other men's books, why not, occasionally, out of our own lives?

Some people, however, make this a much more serious business. They not merely take an occasional dip into the past, but they live in it most of the time. Their minds are calendars of back years. Each month as it comes serves chiefly to remind them of what happened on the corresponding month and day ten years ago. I have known people who have moved twenty times in as many years, but who can not settle down for a fortnight in one place, without getting out the photographs they have carried with them for these twenty years, and placing them all around the room,—“the old familiar faces.” You may meet them in Europe, or in Asia, or in Africa, and their first word always is, “What has become of So-and-So? When have you heard from Thus-and-thus?” Their favorite book is the autograph album. They browse here and there in the pastures through which they are now journeying; but their real sustenance is this cud of sweet and bitter recollection. Their religion is a mild species of ancestor-worship.

A far larger number of people, however, are addicted to the opposite vice, of living not in the past but in the future. They have the same difficulty that the children have; they are always expecting tomorrow, but can never tell when tomor-

row has come. They postpone the actual process of living, so as to get ready to live. When we are in school, we say, "When we get out into the world we will begin; we are only getting ready now." And when we get out into the world we say, "When we are established in business." And when we are established in business, we say, "Pretty soon now, when we have made a competence." And when we have made a competence we say, "It is close at hand now;—when our boys are educated and our girls are married." All the time getting ready to live;—imagining that on down in the future somewhere is the place and the time, and that here and today are only the prelude and the vestibule. We spend our lives in a vain expectation of a future that never arrives, and live forever in a tomorrow that never becomes today.

But between the past and the future, is a little span which we call the present. The past we have in memory; the future in anticipation; but all we ever have in experience is this little while that we call "now." In this little "now" we have to live;—to learn what we may of God's good world; to do what we can for ourselves and our fellows; to enjoy what we may, of God's good gift of life. We may look back for guidance, and ahead for warning or inspiration, but for what we do and what we are we can never get outside of this little hour that we call the present. Our memories and hopes may be elsewhere, but all our business is here.

It is a simple deduction from this principle, that of the different periods of a human life, no one was intended as a mere preliminary or preparation of some period that comes later, but each one of them also for itself.

You can not treat a boy as if he were always to be a boy; but the greatest mistake you can possibly make with him is to treat him as if he were merely a half-done man. He may be dead before he is a man; and if he has not had his boyhood in the meantime, but only a preparation for manhood, he has not really lived.

The mother hears her daughter practising on the piano, and thinks "what a fine player she will be." She looks over her school report and says to her husband, "Our little girl will make a splendid scholar some day." She teaches her of the various duties that life will surely bring to her by and by, and in her imagination she sees her the mistress of a fine house and the wife of a famous man, and she says, "How well prepared she will be for it all." But

all the time it escapes her attention that there are no roses in this little girl's cheeks now,—that she is not a little girl at all but only a woman half done; and that whatever may or may not come to her in the future, she is not living now the life that belongs to her today.

How many great musicians there are, who are great simply because their little feet were made to toddle from the first toward this one goal,—but who would give all their greatness now, and accept the lot of the common man, if they could only have had while it belonged to them the childhood that the common man enjoys.

James Mill foresaw the great man in his boy John Stuart; for a great man he trained him, from the start; and a great man he made him. But that cold, hard light that shines through everything that John Stuart Mill ever thought or wrote,—that singular limitation of a great mind,—that shrinking of a nature that could have been warm and open and sunny,—where did this come from? It came from the fact that he had no childhood. He would have been a greater man,—or failing that he would have been a happier man, which is much more important,—if he had been allowed to be a common boy. The best preparation for manhood is a childhood that would be complete in itself if life ended with it.

In the same manner, the man who grows old gracefully is not the man who in his middle life spends his time preparing for old age, but the man who bears the burden and heat of each day as if it were all. Nature is wise. She will not have us living any portion of our life before we get to it. She leads us on quietly. And the only door through which we shall ever enter upon our future, is this commonplace door of the present.

This applies, just as properly, to the work of men who are in middle life. Young men in college are often so worried about what they shall do when they get out of college, that they do not do what they ought to while they are in college. They are so anxious to succeed later on, that they do not succeed now. This is one of the reasons why so many men wake up at forty or fifty to discover that they are not great men. They have always expected to be great, and always tried to be prepared for it; but they have never actually been great. One clew to life is enough, if you can find it, and follow it. And one of the best and simplest is that expressed in the homely motto, "Do it now."

And what applies to the work of life, applies equally well to that which is second only to work, and that is the enjoyment of life. "Business before pleasure" may be a good enough adage for practical purposes. But pleasure in one's work, and wholesome satisfaction now and all the time, is a much better principle. Life is worth to us what we get out of it. And we shall never get anything out of this part of it, except what we get now.

This is not a plea for laziness, nor for the substitution of recreation for work. But no sight is commoner than the sight of a man postponing the satisfactions and enjoyments of life, and proposing to take them all in a heap after awhile, but meantime losing all capacity for them. He is like a barrel standing out in the sun, waiting to be filled, and meantime falling to pieces. In the book of life, you can not safely put the enjoyments all into the index, or the supplement. They must run through the body of it, and be found expressed or implied upon every page, or the whole thing is tiresome. They are like rest, and food, and sleep, of which no sane man wants a whole world full after awhile, but of which we all need a little every day. This day will never come to me again; neither if I miss them this day, will the joys and satisfactions that belong to it.

"Gather ye rose-buds while ye may
Old time is still a-flying;
And this same flower that smiles today,
Tomorrow may be dying."

Finally, this simple principle of living in the present, needs to be applied, more than to anything else under the sun, to the whole realm of religion.

For it is in religion more than in anything else, that we are always playing off the future against the present. We look for a kingdom of heaven, in some other world. We hope for the reward of our goodness, and tremble for the penalty of our sins,—in some other world. We think that time will cease, and eternity begin, in some other world. We say, "not now," but "after awhile." "Then we shall see God," we say, "and know Him as he is; then we shall understand the mysteries of our lives; then we shall come into his presence,—his immediate presence; enjoyment then will take the place of sorrow, hope ripen into fruition, and heaven will come,—sometime." "Not now, but in the coming years;" "There is a happy land, far, far away;"—these are,

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too much, the burden of our song and the substance of our spiritual hope.

And, of course, in religion as in everything else, we must not live as if there were no future; we may even live for the future, if we wish to; but we should not live in it. What we need, and what religion is designed to give us, is the kingdom of heaven here. Eternity is only a present which does not wear out, and today is just as much a part of it as any other day will ever be. The other world is only the other end of this one. The best, and only, preparation for another life, is the right sort of life right here. We shall see God then, but we may also see him now. The reward of our goodness awaits us in the future; it also awaits us, and is with us, today. The penalty of our sins will meet us there, it also meets us at every turn of the road, here. We are in the immediate presence of God now as much as we shall ever be. God is not waiting for us somewhere behind the veil,—in some other world. This world also is his dwelling-place. Let us know Him now. "Today, if ye will hear his voice." Above all shadows of our present life, shines today the one Source of light and blessing; and "now is the accepted time."

The Religion of a Gentleman

*"Seraphic intellect and force
To seize and throw the doubts of man;
Impassion'd logic, which outran
The hearer in its fiery course;*

*High nature amorous of the good,
But touch'd with no ascetic gloom;
And passion pure in snowy bloom
Thro' all the years of April blood;*

*And manhood fused with female grace
In such a sort, the child would twine
A trustful hand, unask'd, in thine,
And find his comfort in thy face."*

IN MEMORIAM.

The Religion of a Gentleman

Among the ideals that the modern man holds before him, none is stronger or more attractive than the ideal of being a gentleman. The boy may begin with a very queer idea of what a gentleman is. He may revise this idea again and again. He may realize later that he has failed to reach it; he may even abandon it. But there are probably few men who have not intended at some time to be gentlemen. I do not know any criticism which would strike the average man more severely, than to have it said, especially if he felt there was some truth in it, that he was not a gentleman.

As to what we mean by a gentleman, I suppose we should all be substantially agreed, though we might state our ideas in various ways. To the girl of seventeen, the gentleman is a man who is polite and deferential in the presence of young ladies. To the athlete he is one who bears himself honorably toward his antagonist, who can lose without being angry or win without being proud. To the business man he is one who treats his customers fairly and his competitors generously. A boy brought up in business, and a man accustomed to life in the army, would probably define the gentleman in quite different terms. So would the man from Connecticut, and the man from North Carolina. But ask all of these persons to pick out, from a hundred common acquaintances, a half-dozen typical gentlemen, and two-thirds of them would pick out the same identical men. However our definitions may differ, we all know what we mean by a gentleman, and we all mean substantially the same thing.

Not that all gentlemen are equally easy to recognize. One of the truest touches in the story of "The Virginian," is the length of time it takes the school-teacher from Vermont to realize that this cow-boy is the finest gentleman she ever met. So the heroine of Thackery's "Vanity Fair," respects Major Dobbin, and likes to have him around to wait on her, but cannot fall in love with him because he does not appear to her as a gentleman. Whereupon Thackeray remarks, "It must be remembered that this poor lady had never met a gentleman in her life until this present moment. Perhaps these are rarer personages than some of us think. Which of us can point out many such in his circle? My friend, the Major," he continues, "I write, without

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any doubt, in mine. He certainly had very large feet and hands. He had very long legs, a yellow face, and a slight lisp, which at first was rather ridiculous. But his thoughts were just, his brains were fairly good, his life was honest and pure, and his heart warm and humble." It is a misfortune, undoubtedly, for a man who is a gentleman, not to have any of the ordinary facilities for letting people know it. But it is a much greater misfortune, and one under which some excellent people labor all their lives, not to be able to recognize a gentleman unless he is cut according to the fashion-plate.

But what we mean by a gentleman is plain enough. We mean that a man must have a keen sense of honor. He must not be a coward or a sneak. He must not be a brag or a bully. He must be above anything mean or small, incapable of taking advantage, or betraying a confidence. He must be perfectly sincere, with no veneer on him. He must respect himself. And he must have an equal respect and deference for all other people. He must be clean, inside and out. There must be no person, nor class in society, whose rights he would willingly disregard. He must have no contempt for anything except meanness. He should have manners, if possible, which show that this is the sort of man he is,—genial, courteous, deferential. Some men indeed who are not gentlemen may cultivate these manners, just as some men may look wise who really do not know anything. Occasionally a man may be a gentleman at heart, for whom it is not easy to acquire these manners. I should go so far as to say that if a man cannot be a gentleman the very least he can do is to act like one. But in the long run that which is deepest in a man works most conspicuously to the surface.

Now I do not hold, though I have heard it affirmed, that the gentleman and the Christian are one and the same thing. Christianity has been in the world a great many centuries; the gentleman is essentially a modern creation. If we speak exactly, there were no gentlemen in the ancient world. There were soldiers, patriots, wise men and good men, but distinctively no gentlemen.

If this seems to you a strange statement, take your Bible and look it through. What idea of a gentleman had dawned upon the minds of a people who pictured the first man trying to lay his own sins upon the shoulders of his wife? Or will you take as your sample of gentleman, Abraham, who, because Sarah was fair, and he was afraid some

Egyptian might want her, and might kill him on her account, handed her over to Pharaoh with the remark, "She is my sister"? Or shall it be Jacob, who conspired with his mother to cheat his blind old father out of the blessing that belonged to Esau? Or shall it be David, who used the loyalty of his friend and subject, Uriah, to betray him, and to steal his wife? If there is any man in the Old Testament who would naturally be described as a gentleman it is some wholly minor and unimportant character, like Jonathan, or like Boaz, who was kind to Ruth. Even the men you admire the most, like the prophets, you would not think of describing by the title of "gentleman." This is not merely because they were all subject to the same weaknesses as the rest of us; it is not because they were less than gentlemen; it is because that distinctive note that we find in the gentleman, even with his failings, is lacking in Old Testament characters.

Or read Greek literature. The Greek heroes complain, they whimper, they tear their hair, they abuse each other, they call each other names, they cringe before their superiors, they are brutal to those who stand below them. They have their virtues, of course, but they lack precisely the virtues of the gentleman. Turn from any of these ancient men to the men you find in the plays of Shakespeare. You are in a different world. Here are men with their failings and their sins, but the heroes among them at least are gentlemen.

For nineteen hundred years people have been Christians; but it is only a few hundred years since we have had this particular type of man we call a gentleman. No, I do not hold it to be true that a gentleman is necessarily a Christian.

Our modern Christian ideal has at least three elements in it. These three elements are not only distinct; they have come to us from wholly different parts of the world, and widely different periods of our history.

There is first the idea of conscience, the strictly moral element; this we get from Judea. There is next the element of intelligence, or culture; this we get from Greece. And there is a third element, and this is what we mean when we say a man is a gentleman,—the element of honor, courage, chivalry; this we get neither from Judea nor from Greece, but from the races of Northern Europe.

The Jews lived in the presence of the invisible realities. They thought of human life as the service not of self, nor of one's fellows, but of the



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higher power that lay beyond the reach of the eyes and the mind, but was revealed to the inmost and deepest soul of man. God became to the Hebrew as he did not to the ancient world at large, a perfectly definite, concrete, and personal power in human life. To enthrone in the world, above all powers and principalities and possibilities, this moral element of man's nature, to identify this with God, and to purify and exalt this conception to the highest point, was the mission of the Jew. And all this, carried still higher in the teachings of the New Testament, and purified still further from national and temporary limitations, passed over into Christianity.

But Christianity from the beginning was only half Jewish. Side by side with this Jewish element there came in an element quite foreign to Hebrew life and thought. No Greek ever bowed his knee to the moral law, nor deified conscience and set it upon the throne of the universe. He loved strength, beauty, imagination, wisdom, and all the powers of the natural man. The highest product of Judea was the prophet and the saint. The highest product of Greece was the philosopher and the poet. Early Christianity, half Jewish and half Greek, combined these two strains, and set up her ideal of morality and intelligence, sainthood and wisdom.

Then came down into this Christian civilization, half Jewish and half Greek, the peoples of Northern Europe. No saints were they, though they had their own gods. No philosophers certainly; and no artists, though they had a rude poetry of their own. But one thing they brought with them to which both Jew and Greek had been strangers,—a spirit of personal freedom, independence, and honor, of disregard for merely personal advantage and convenience, and above all a certain chivalrous attitude of man toward woman. Up into the north, farther among these Germanic peoples, Christianity spread. And by the time that this spirit of these northern peoples had crystallized into the institution of chivalry, the idea of the gentleman had taken its place, side by side with the idea of the wise man and the saint, in the Christian ideal. And there it stands today.

All this shows in the clearest possible way, how being a gentleman is part of being a Christian, but how far it is from being all of it. A man may be a gentleman but an ignoramus. He lacks the Greek infusion. He inherits from Britain but not from Athens. Or he may be a gentleman, and yet be altogether of the earth earthy; he lacks the Jew-

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ish infusion. He inherits from the German forests and from the days of chivalry, but not from Judea and the age of the prophets. The gentleman, so far as he is a gentleman and nothing more, may be said to be about one-third of a Christian.

It is not enough, therefore, for a man to set before himself, or for others to set before him, the ideal of being a gentleman. This is what he should start with. It is not what he should end with. By this one path a man may come out at ignorance, or uselessness, no matter how handsomely he carries his shoulders or how politely he tips his hat during the journey. Strike out from Christendom, as we know it, all that has come down to us from Greece and from Judea, and leave only what we have received from the North of Europe, and that will show you what a picayune affair is the life of a modern man whose only ideal is to be a gentleman.

The modern man should be a gentleman and something more. He is the heir of all the ages, not merely of one. He should start with this. But he should add,

"Let knowledge grow from more to more,
But more of reverence in us dwell.
That mind and soul, according well,
May make one music as before,
But vaster."

Start with the gentleman. Then add intelligence and morality and you have the Christian.

On the other hand, it is equally true that the Christian ideal with this idea of the gentleman left out is one-third gone. And if it is not necessarily the most valuable one-third, it is certainly the most attractive. The Greek philosophers used to say that goodness and beauty were identical. If that is true, it is often a case of disguised identity. Why do we despise the monk of the middle ages? Not because he was useless. Nor because he seems to us a half demented fanatic. He was often learned and laborious, often a saint, and often a wise man. We despise him because he was dirty and coarse and ill-bred, and seems to us to have lacked the first instincts and habits of a gentleman. Have you ever thought how fast the gospel of Christ would travel, if every Christian had the grace and charm that we always imagine that Christ had? The best advertisement of the Christian religion, and the best proof of its truth and power, is the cultivated, intelligent Christian gentleman.

Now, finally, we go a little deeper than this.

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When you get it at its best, Christianity is pre-eminently the religion of the gentleman. Every man who thinks at all acknowledges the presence in our world of some ultimate reality. The thing that shows what kind of man he is, is his bearing in the presence of this reality. Beyond all things that we see and touch, beyond the reach of time and change, there is a power, or life, or spirit, from which all things have come and in which all things perpetually dwell.

Now there are various attitudes that a man may take toward this final reality, which may equally entitle him to be called a religious man. He may bow his head to it as he does to the storm. He may cringe before it, in fear. He may abase himself in its presence, and think to win its favor by heaping abuse and scorn upon his own head. This is religion, but it is not the religion of the gentleman. A gentleman must stand like a man, not crawl like a serpent, even in the presence of his Maker.

Or, rising above this attitude, a man may desire to know this reality, and with all sorts of subtlety and persistence may pry into its nature and its purposes. This also is a religion, and a religion of a nobler sort. It is the religion of the philosopher, the typical wise man of the ages. But it is not necessarily the religion of the gentleman.

But a man may put both these together; he may feel his smallness in the presence of the Infinite; he may be truly humble before the power that overmasters him and that he cannot fathom; he may inquire with all the energy of his soul into the meaning of the mysteries by which he is surrounded, peer into the darkness as far as he can see, and carry his little candle as far as he can out into the corners; and then beyond all this he may stand erect and self-respecting; he may know himself to be of one substance with this ultimate and infinite spirit, and feel in his own heart the dignity that belongs to a child of the eternal; he may carry himself with deference, with self-control and with an assurance that nothing can shake, in the presence of God, and by word and deed make himself worthy of the respect that God has for him;—no superstition, because he knows; no fear, because he loves; no dishonoring or false humiliation of himself, because he is a child of the Infinite; but always a quiet dignity, a confidence unshaken, and a serenity that nothing can disturb; this is the religion of a gentleman. And this is Christianity.





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